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ABSTRACT

This publication summarizes the evolution of the basic ideas and philosophies of a community development organization called Servol in Trinidad and recounts how over nine years these ideas coalesced into a unified approach. The document describes how the earliest projects--a welding institute, a clinic, a nursery school, and recreational facilities--were supplemented by masonry and electrical training, and how skills training for girls was introduced as Servol shifted from a "street dialogue" approach to a greater emphasis on skills training and on-the-job training. The document also describes the emergence of the "life center" idea (so-called because Servol was interested in people's entire lives, not just parts of them), and Servol's family farm project. And finally, the document assesses the value of Servol against the backdrop of the problem of rural-urban drift in the Third World and discusses what kind of people make the best life center workers. Appendices contain details of future plans and a structure and personnel organization chart. (RDN)

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THE SERVOL LIFE CENTRES

by GERARD PANTIN C.S.Sp.

SERVOL

SERVOL LIFE CENTRES

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is not intended as a history of Servol or an account of its development from simple beginnings or even the scope of its work. Those interested in these aspects are referred to "SERVOL' 1970 – 1974" and "A mole cricket called Servol" (Pergammon Press, 1979).

It is more an attempt to summarize how certain basic ideas and philosophies of an organization which has chosen to follow an intuitive rather than a logical path, have gradually, over the space of nine years, coalesced into a unified approach to community development. In a nutshell, it tells a story. It is the story of how one, two and eventually a number of people chose to intervene in the lives of a large number of other people and what happened as a result; and since the intervention was centred around the entire life of the people and not merely one or other aspect, it is not inappropriate that the structures which evolved should be termed "Life Centres".

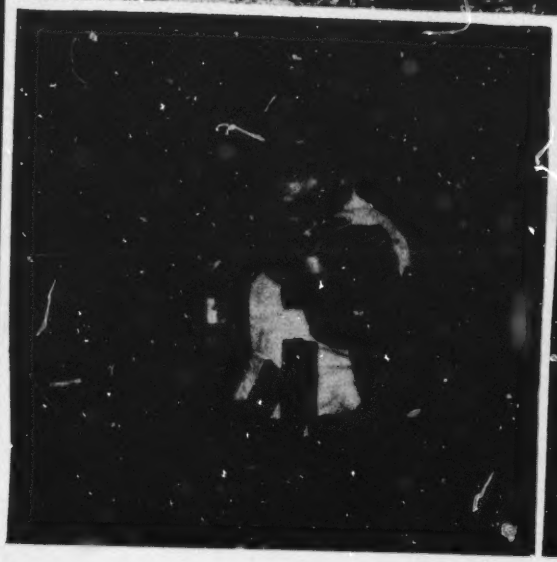
16th April, 1979.

Gerard Pantin

"The purpose of education is therefore the development of man as a member of society. It is not . . . . . to turn out technicians who can be used as instruments in the expansion of the economy. It is to turn out men and women who have the technical knowledge and ability to expand the economy for the benefit of man in society . . . . .

What I am trying to do is to make a serious distinction between a system of education which makes liberated men and women who are skilful users of tools and a system of education which turns men and women into tools."

Julius Nyerere
Dar es Salaam
20th May, 1974



... everyone on the hill wants to learn welding.

CHAPTER ONE: THE WAY IT HAPPENED

RESPECTFUL INTERVENTION (1970 – 1972)

The people who began Servol had no idea what they were up against or where it would lead. If they had, they would probably have fled a hundred miles from the hills of Laventille. Their very naivete and lack of knowledge enabled them to take a step which would have daunted others. They saw it as something quite simple: there were some people who seemed to need help; they went to them and asked: "How can we help?"

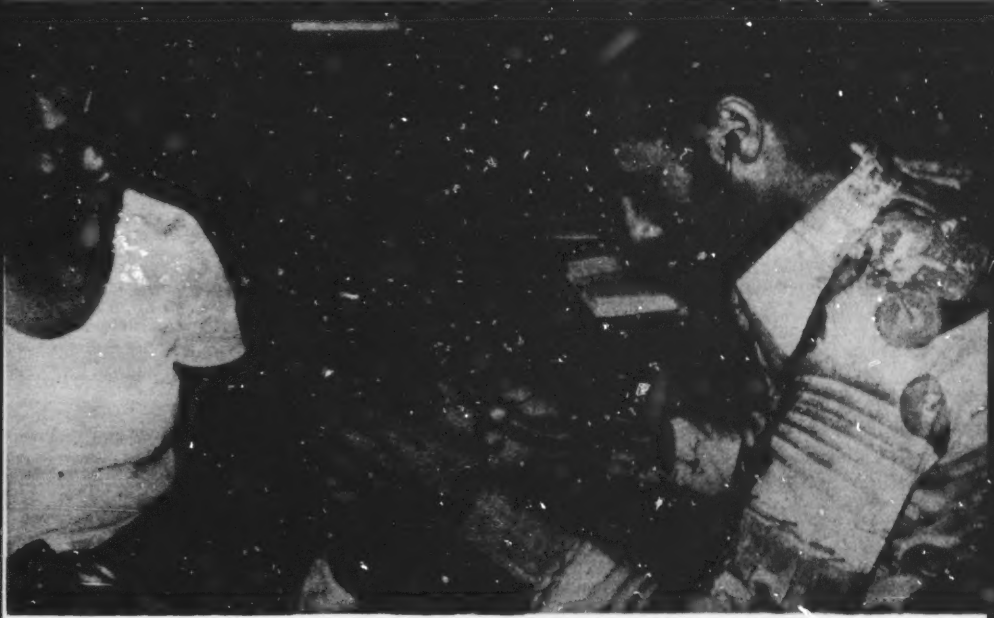
During the first four months, the general answer was unequivocal: "You can't; get lost!" But here and there requests were made for a football, some wood to build a centre, a few benches to sit on. In all cases, the people were prepared to meet half the cost of these items; it sounded fair, so Servol gave the other half.

In early 1971, there was less hostility and more people were prepared to talk to them. In January came the first serious community request from St. Barb's, Laventille: Teach our young people a trade so that they can get jobs and get a doctor into the area to treat the sick. What trade? Welding, of course, Don't you know everyone on the "hill" wants to learn welding?

An architect was commissioned to draw plans, donations of money and equipment obtained, land was bought, the voluntary labour of the community enlisted and at the end of 1971, Servol opened the "Servol Welding Institute". Why Institute? Because it wasn't a money making venture, since the main purpose was to teach forty apprentices the art of welding, so it couldn't be called a business. Nor could it be called a school, since from the very start the emphasis was on production of saleable items, as it was planned that the project should support itself. Thus, "Institute", which was vague enough to cover both aspects.

The most unique feature of the institute was that a medical clinic was part of the building. In this section, a roster of city doctors took turns in holding clinics each day while pharmicists who had also volunteered their services, dispensed drugs in the adjacent pharmacy. Below this building, Servol had also worked with the youths of the area to build a basketball court and cricket practice nets, where hundreds of boys and girls assembled in the evening. In close by Hamlet Trace, Servol had also helped a youth group to construct a centre and to start a nursery school for the two to five year olds.

The project looked like nothing on earth; if like anything, an amoeba which flowed slowly on englufing anything it came across. Whoever heard of a medical clinic next to a welding shop? Or mothers with babies waiting for doctors amid the noise of transformers and the flashing of sparks? Or teachers bringing pre-school children for check ups while young men grumbled that they had to wait their turn? Or groups of basketball and netball players moving aside the welding equipment at nights to hold dances and concerts in the building? Why did Servol pack all these things together?



. . . . a medical clinic was part of the building . . .

. . . . and a nursery school for two to five year olds.

Well, you see, it wasn't really planned that way; it was just that the boys and girls wanted to learn to weld as well as to play and there were so many two to five year olds dragging the street and there were sick people in the area and the young people had no place to hold their function and how can you say "no" after asking "how can we help"? So that's the way it all started.

MAKE SHIFT EXPANSION (1973 - 1975)

By 1973, Servol could see clearly, that despite every imaginable type of problem, the welding institute - Clinic - Nursery School - Recreation hodge podge was a great success and attracting many more people than could be handled. Since several new applicants had asked to be trained as plumbers, it was decided to start a plumbing institute; since a number of people had come to the clinic with toothache, it was obvious that dentists had to be drawn into the programme. With very little money and no available land, Servol rented premises in St. Paul's Street, Laventille, and set up a plumbing institute and dental Clinic. If welding could be joined to medical, why not plumbing with dentistry?

From the production point of view, the plumbing institute was even more successful than the welding. In fact, after twelve months of existence, the fledgling institute in open tender, won an $80,000 contract to install all the plumbing in a Government block of apartments and ensured constant work and training for two years.

Encouraged by this, Servol cleared out a room in its office building in Duncan Street and started carpentry in the same place where school children were being helped with library service, nursery school teachers were being trained and all Servol's secretarial work was being handled. Those involved were heard to remark that after an initial period of painful adjustment, the saws and hammers began to squeak and bang in the same key as the typewriters and that the young apprentices actually found that the wide-eyed admiration of teachers and children looking through the window, was in fact an incentive to better work.

Towards the end of 1974, Servol realized that it had only to add masonry and electrical training to its courses to enable it to become a full blown construction company. So the welding institute was extended to accommodate the masons, while a room in a parish hall was "borrowed" from a sympathetic parish priest and electrical classes begun. If Servol has one weakness, it is that it cannot ignore a cry for help, particularly when it is an indignant cry for help and most especially when this cry come from feminine throats; and in 1973, two such cries of extraordinary strength, shattered the eardrums of Duncan Street.

The first came from two women who demanded to know what was Servol doing for the aged and the bedridden in the ghetto areas? A feeble reply that Servol was not a welfare

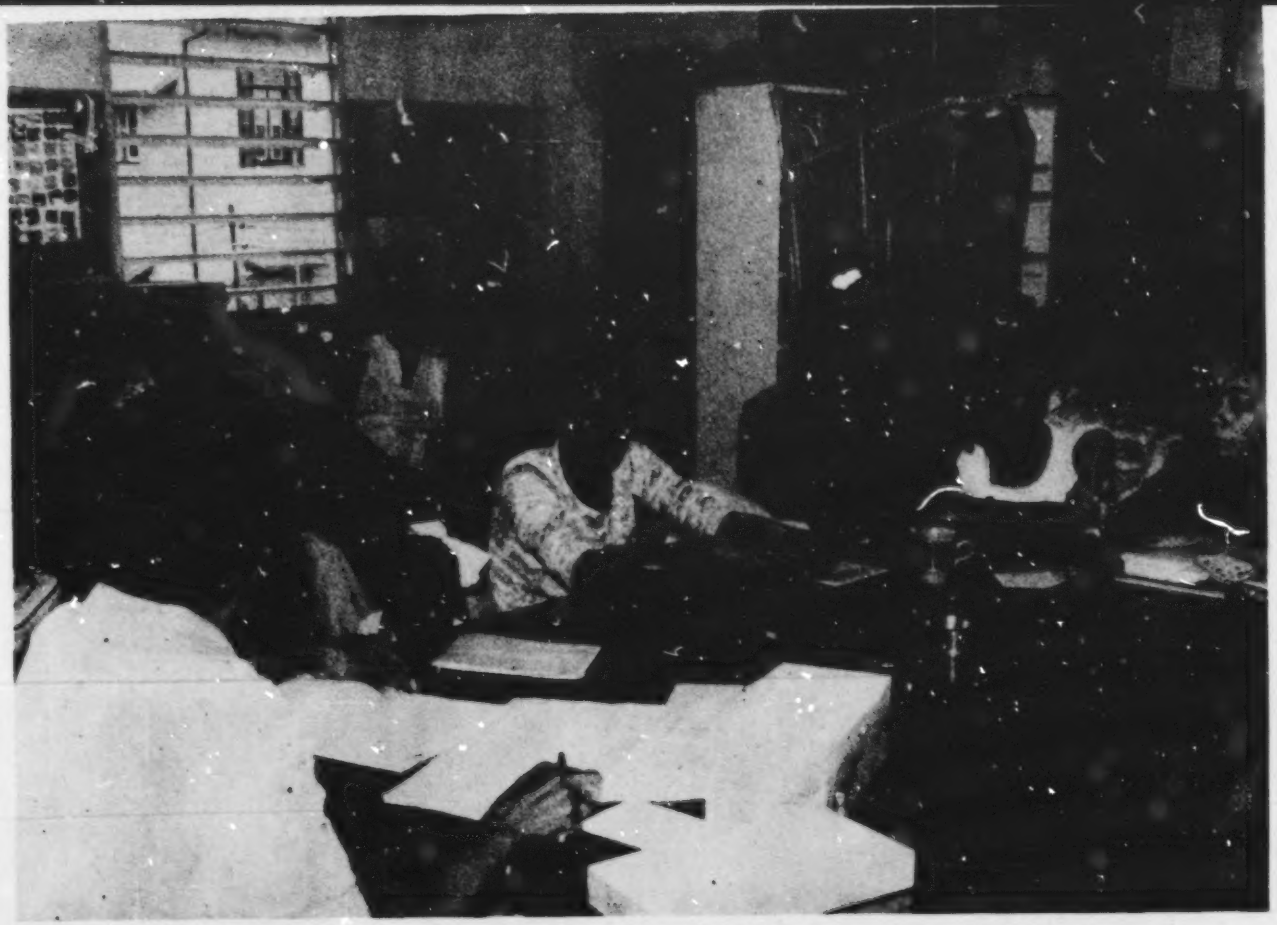
organization was brushed aside with contempt and with two new additions to its staff, Servol set about organizing its "Old Peoples' Food Stamp Programme". It was, in effect, a simple scheme. Two hundred and forty middle class people were persuaded to donate ten dollars a week to a specific old person whom Servol had identified as being really in need. Food stamps were printed and ten dollars worth of these stamps were distributed to a corresponding number of the needy aged, who exchanged them at shops for food, the stamps being redeemed from the shop keepers for cash at the end of every month. So old people joined the motley crowd at Duncan Street.

The second cry had a strong feminist flavour; was Servol a chauvinist organization? If not, how come they were providing training for one hundred and forty boys and mere twenty-two girls? That their training for boys ranged from welding, plumbing, masonry, carpentry and electrical installation while the only training provided for girls was nursery education? These were unanswerable questions and Servol began to rack its brains where to start programmes for girls. The only possible available space was an old house Servol was renting for its school for special children, special in that these children were mentally retarded or deaf.

It was in this building that Servol began courses in sewing, catering, child care and handicraft for girls.

. . . the aged and the bedridden in the ghetto areas. . . . .

. . . . a chauvinist organization?



... people brought together and allowed to interact. 13

CHAPTER TWO

THE VOCATIONAL CENTRE

A TIME FOR REFLECTION (1975 – 76)

In every project, there must be a time to pause and ask: "What are we really doing?" Such a period was the early part of 1975. Servol's attitude towards the evaluation of a project has always been, and still is, very ambivalent. Immersed in the daily, back breaking effort to respond to community needs in an organized manner, no member of the organization can easily be persuaded to take time off to do any type of conventional evaluation in which the product of an experiment is measured or assessed against a control; this makes Servol the despair of the academics who have shown an interest in its work. On the other hand, Servol has always shown great interest in the evidence which gradually accumulates as feed-back from the people in whose lives it has intervened. In fact, members of the organization never cease to ask questions, sift answers and feedback this data to each other at least once a month when representatives from every project meet to report on how things are going. What did in fact emerge as a result of this sharing of views and experiences in the first half of 1975?

Firstly, there was the realization that Servol had gradually changed its approach to community work, from dialoguing with street corner groups to involving them in skill training courses. Much heated debate was needed before those involved became quite convinced that perhaps the best thing a social worker can do for a young person is to help him or her obtain permanent employment through training. It was also realized that case work with individuals or groups is best conducted around training centres of the kind Servol was developing rather than in the antiseptic atmosphere of a counselling chamber.

Further, exciting things seemed to be happening when groups of people were brought together and allowed to interact. The fiercely protective attitude of gangs of young men towards the nursery school children was noted; the effect of allowing an increasing number of girls to enter those skill training institutes traditionally reserved for boys, was quite electrifying to workshop morale; the softening effect which the programme for the aged had on the wider community was remarkable; the affection and sympathy which mentally handicapped children so easily generate in others was fascinating to relate.

But the physical set up of the entire programme was draining Servol of all its personnel and straining its resources to breaking point. The main problem lay in the physical distance between welding-cum-masonry, plumbing-cum-dental, electrical, carpentry-cum-aged, special children-cum-women's training and the seven nursery schools. There were just not enough community workers to spread around and administration and supervision was becoming a nightmare.

And so, the ideal of integrating a number of disciplines together, coupled with the pragmatic necessity of having as many things as possible under one roof, led to the decision to build one, large vocational centre.

A TIME FOR BUILDING (1975 – 1977)

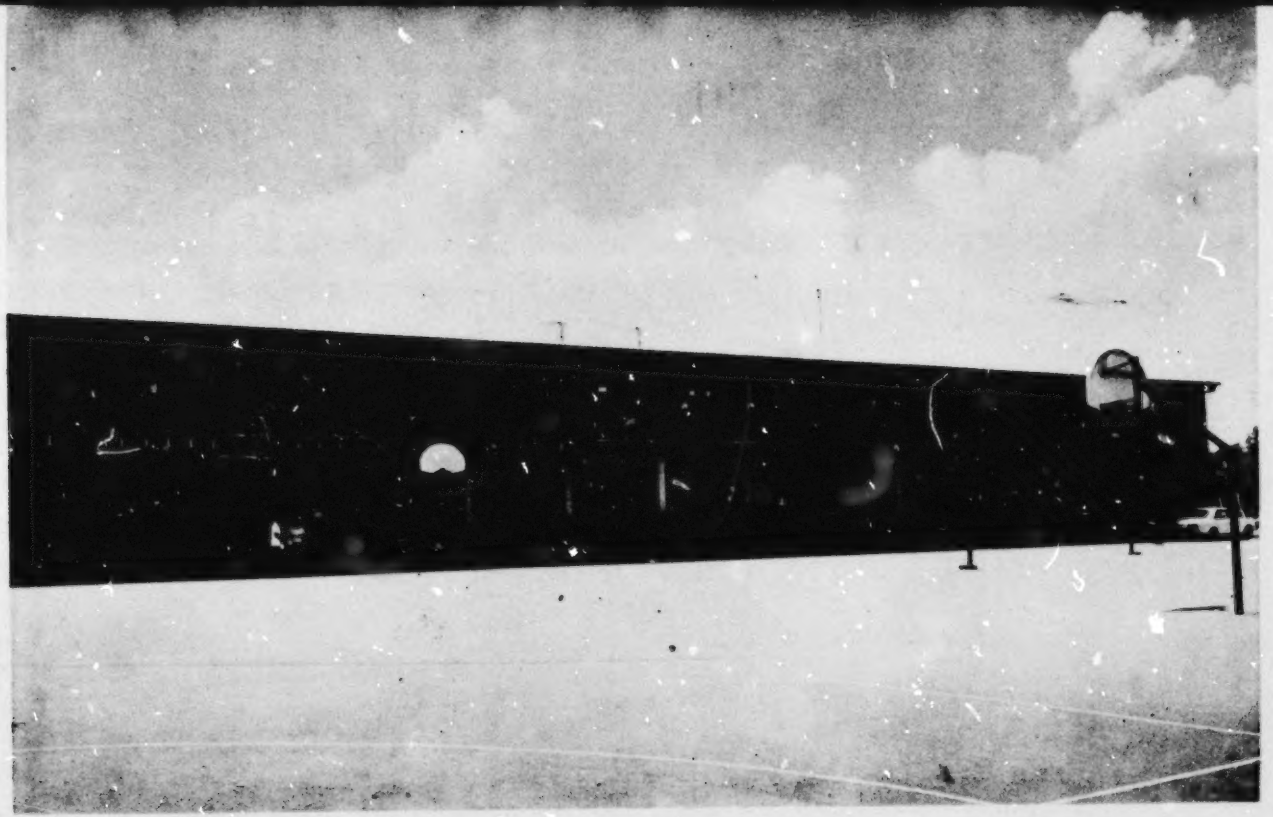
A piece of land on the Beetham Estate (formerly called Shanty Town) was donated by the National Housing Authority and plans were drawn for a centre which would house, not only the skill training institutes but a medical clinic (including a small operating theatre), a dental clinic, a day care centre for young children, a legal aid clinic, an old people's service, sporting facilities for the young and a playground for younger children. Since the complex was sited in the very centre of sixty-three acres of reclaimed swamp which would eventually house six thousand people, many of them migrants from rural areas and even from other West Indian islands, the project was quickly given a longitudinal dimension: to study the effect in terms of community development, of the setting up of this centre among this particular group of people who were well known for their unwillingness to come together as a community.

Since on-the-job training was one of the novel features of the Servol vocational programme, it was decided that the apprentices themselves would construct their own centre. The work began in May 1975, when ninety-seven youngsters who had enrolled in one or other of the institutes, assembled at the site on the Beetham Highway, to begin the enormous task of clearing the land, excavating and laying the foundations, under the direction of their instructors. This epic story deserves a book all to itself; here, only the briefest summary can be attempted. How they toiled on through unusually heavy rains which turned the site into a guagmire; how the first set of foundations was condemned by the engineers and had to be dug up again and re-cast in March, 1976; how the basic structural frame was finally finished in September and the ground floor and sewer pipes laid by the end of the year; how 1977 was ushered in by carpenters and welders adding their contribution of doors and grills, how the community chipped in on weekends to help with the bricklaying; how a shortage of cement slowed the work down in June and July but how it all picked up again with the electricians moving in to wire the building and install the woodworking machines; how the girls took over painting in November and how the kitchen equipment was installed in December; how eventually, after two years and ten months of steady toil, the building was formally opened by the Minister of Education on February 25th, 1978.

> The dedication plaque was terse and to the point: "To those youth of Trinidad and Tobago who have been referred to as untrainable and unemployable and who in constructing this building have comprehensively demonstrated the absurdity of these epithets, SERVOL respectfully dedicates this centre."

There was a message there for the youth, the community and the wider society; they are still absorbing it.

A time for building.



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The finished Centre.

A TIME TO OBSERVE (1977 – 78)

Far more than the slow growth of the concrete structure, Servol was concerned with monitoring what was happening to the ninety-seven apprentices, the five instructors and the administrative staff, as the project advanced. The first year was characterized by obvious friction between the apprentices of different institutes, between the instructors themselves and between everybody and the three person administrative team. Servol has always regarded conflict as an integral part of human life and the ability to handle it successfully, the ultimate test of maturity. So meetings were held, grievances aired, complaints listened to, discipline administered but the work never ceased. Servol discovered that there was a strong, cohesive force present in allowing physical work to continue, while differences of opinions were sorted out; and slowly, ever so slowly, a team emerged out of the defensiveness, the antagonism and the individuality which strongly characterized the early beginnings.

While work progressed, literacy classes were organized for a number of apprentices and counselling continued apace as home problems continued to affect the attitude and behaviour of several of the youngsters. In addition, Servol continued to insist that each institute operate as a small business, being paid by the parent body for work done on the centre each week and itself paying its instructor and apprentices suitable remuneration. When the centre was finally finished, there was no need to sit down and plan a programme. Careful observation had clearly indicated the way the centre was to operate.

A TIME TO CONCLUDE (1978 – 79)

What really goes on at the centre is from one aspect, very obvious and from another, exquisitely subtle and easily over-looked by the average visitor.

If such a visitor were to walk around the centre on any particular day he will be immediately struck by a number of things. What usually strikes him at first, is the bewildering variety of activities going on at the same time: babies are being washed, fed or put to sleep in the day care centre, small children are playing on the swings; a doctor is interviewing a patient while a nurse is lecturing a group of nurses aides; a dentist's drill is an octave above the pitch of the woodworking machine; the electricians are looking at a film on house wiring while the sewing room is a beehive of activity and fragrant odours emanate from the kitchen. Where are the plumbers and masons? They are out on a job, renovating an old house in the up-town area and the arrival of the Bedford pick up to collect cement and P.V.C. pipe confirms this. The time clock with its rows of neatly pigeonholed cards impresses as does the cleanliness of the entire building. What is also noticeable is that though there is a definite sense of order and discipline everywhere, this is combined with a certain casualness more remiscent of a family than an institution. He notes thoughtfully, while chatting with a member of the administration, that the apprentices seem to feel free to walk into the office and to interrupt with queries, requests or complaints, which are just as casually handled.

. . . to be taught how to hold, feed and play with children.

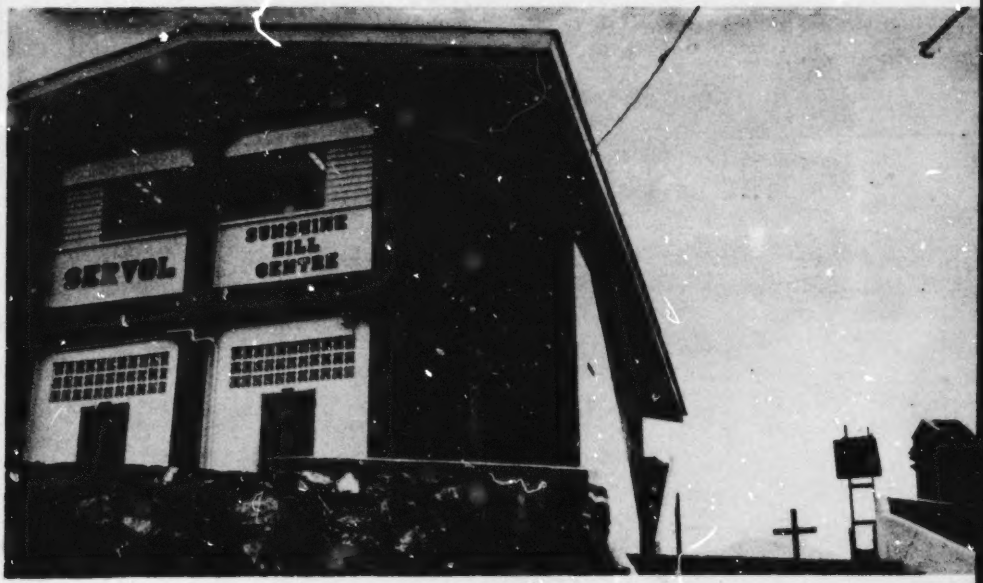
All this is pretty obvious; but if the visitor is prepared to sit very quietly in a corner for a longer time and listen, he will begin to hear the heart beat of the centre. Two girls have a quarrel, they are encouraged to speak it out in front of the nurse and guided to a compromise solution to their problem. Some apprentices resent the attitude of one instructor; a member of the administration sits down with all concerned, listens to both sides and encourages them to sort out the disagreement themselves. It it is a Friday, all coverge on the audio-visual room, where informal discussion takes place on a fascinating variety of subjects: how to deal with authoritarian parents, how to understand oneself, what are complexes, how to identify complexes in yourself, how to handle scars left by lack of love or attention. Questions are put to the moderator and the visitor cannot believe it, when one mentally defective boy who can only utter garbled noises, stands up to ask a "question", is politely thanked and congratulated by the moderator without any giggling or satirical laughter on the part of the eighty young people in the room. Underpriviledged? This is sensitivity and courtesy at its exquisite best.

He sees a group of carpenters going to the day nursery, to be taught how to hold, feed and play with children; he sees two young stalwarts assisting an old person upstairs and giving her a cup of coffee and installing her with others of her generation, to look at TV in a room specially set aside for this purpose. He is told that only last week, the community worker from the Centre discovered an old man living nearby who had not left his bed for three months, that she had gone into the incredibly filthy room with four of the boys and girls from the centre, that they had scrubbed the place, washed the old man and left him crying tears of joy, that someone had come to see him.

Gradually, it begins to dawn on the visitor, that something over and above skill training is going on in that centre. The young boy or girl who enters the centre is brought into contact with the mini-world of Servol with its babies, infants, adolescents, adults and old people; with work and play, doctors, dentists, lawyers and people from the community. The apprentice is exposed to and allowed to interact with this rich environment of people, activities and things and in so doing, he is helped to find himself and to journey into the world outside with a better understanding of what it is all about.

One of the most interesting things of all is that the majority of apprentices gain their National Trade Certificates and leave Servol with a certain veiled truculence. as if they were not sure whether they liked the organization or not; but six months after, many return for a quick visit to inform staff that they have got good jobs and the transformation in these same boys and girls is remarkable. What accounts for this change? It is hard to say. Perhaps it is because they have discovered, that what Servol told them about life outside was true, that they had been really trained to face reality and the entire experience was not just another gigantic hoax, as so much of their life had been.

At this stage the visitor might well depart, shaking his head and saying: "And you call all that, a vocational centre?" Come to think of it, he has a point.



... conceived, built and fully operational in the symbolical space of nine months.

. . . . a day nursery for the children of working mothers . . . .

CHAPTER THREE

THE EMERGENCE OF THE LIFE CENTRE IDEA (1978 – 1979)

It sometimes happens, that people who break new ground are often quite unaware of the newness of what they are doing, partly because they are too close to the project and partly because they frequently continue to use traditional terms to describe a new concept. Thus it was that everyone involved in the Servol thing referred to its structures as "centres" without making any attempt to develop a really appropriate name for what was going on. The Beetham building was called a "Vocational Centre", the one at St. Barb's a "Servol Centre" and the agricultural complex in Gran Couva "The Farm". The Servol team was fully aware that these terms were vague, inaccurate and even misleading but they were not hung up on nomenclature, so for a long time they never felt compelled to do anything about it.

THE SUNSHINE HILL CENTRE

In 1978, a new project was conceived, built and became fully operational in the symbolical space of nine months. It happened like this. The Servol School for Special Children which occupied the same compound as one of the nursery schools, was violently attacked one day. The hidden enemy was millions of termites who had apparently decided that the ninety-three year old house which was being rented for this purpose, had served its time. Where to go? As usual, something cropped up. The Catholic School Board had been operating a small primary school some three hundred yards away for almost seventy years on a hill called Calvary Hill. This school was razed to the ground by fire in 1975 and there were no plans to rebuild it. Could Servol use the site?

This offer was made in February, 1978; in March, Servol held its first of a series of meetings with the community in the area, to plan a new building. The anticipated initial hostility and suspicion were overcome through dialogue with the various groups, the community elected a committee to work with Servol in drawing up a plan and agreement was reached on all points. The complex would house a school for sixty retarded and deaf children, a day nursery for the children of working mothers, a medical clinic, a small printery, as well as a basketball court for the youth and a playground for the children. Servol would look after the construction of the building with its construction crew of apprentices and instructors and the community would approach Government to finance the playground and basketball court as a special project, with people from the area being employed. The people pledged to collect what they could to buy materials while Servol would also seek funds from the private and public sector.

Work began on July 17th, 1978 and on December 10th, 1978, the school was formally opened. This was a tremendous achievement in terms of a well organized construction programme, enthusiastic community participation and an extraordinarily strong feeling of proprietorship which had been engendered in the people of the area during the relatively short period of the project's existence. Perhaps one small but important reason for this, is that the people themselves were responsible for the new name of the building.

"The Sunshine Hill Centre"

. . . . those very special children

. . . to turn us away from selfishness . . . .

Better things were to follow. From January, 1979, classes began for the special children and the day nursery was opened; but requests came pouring in from different people in the community who wanted to use the centre in various ways. One primary school teacher began an evening class for backward children, another wanted to begin adult classes while yet another skilled in handicraft, began teaching a small group of women. The basketball team organized themselves and entered the National Competition and work continued on the playground. It was a real rebirth of community life in the area, which began with the moment they were consulted about the centre, grew as the people marvelled at the skill and industry of the young apprentices and blossomed into their strong participation in the running of the centre. And like a thread holding all this together was the presence in the area of those children who came to the centre each day, the mentally retarded, the slow learners, the deaf; disarming hostility by their innocence, removing suspicion by their candour and releasing the mainspring of protectiveness in so many, by their very helplessness. The dedication plaque is not just a collection of nice thoughts; it really and truly represents what is happening to the people of that community.

"To those very special children
Sent to us by God as messengers of love
To soften our hard hearts
To turn us away from selfishness
To bring out all that is tender in us
To reach us in a way that we seldom reach each other."

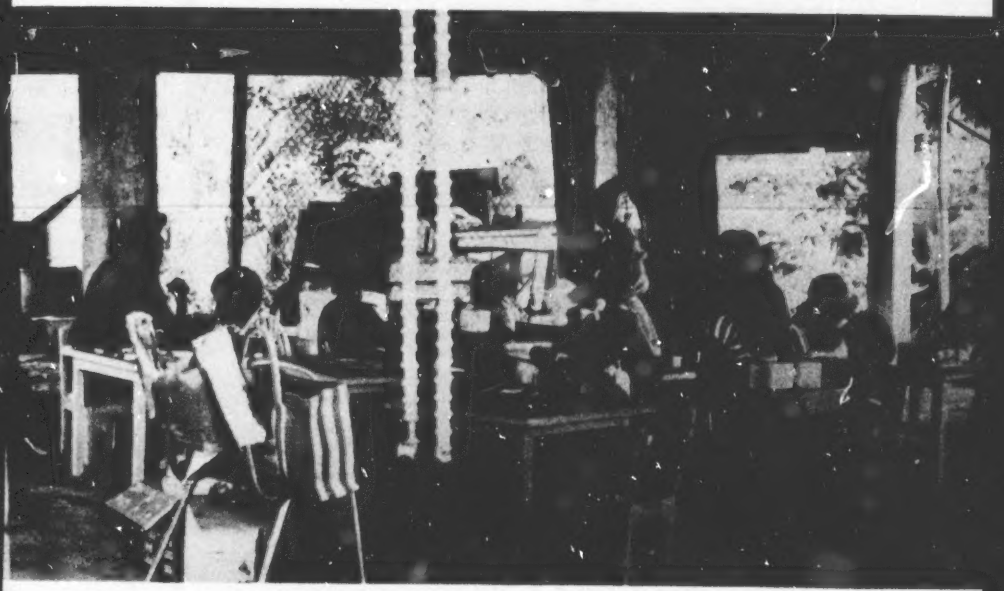
THE FARM

Way back in 1973, Servol entered the field of rural development by establishing three youth farms, one in Gran Couva, Trinidad, and two in Tobago. These projects were not very successful though all of them are still operating in one form or another. The project in Richmond, Tobago, has been handed over completely to the youth group who are still making a valiant attempt to make it succeed; the one in Goldsborough, Tobago, has been converted into a senior citizens farm and is being very efficiently managed by this group of experienced farmers with Servol maintaining occasional contact with this farm.

In retrospect, it seems apparent that Servol was never really comfortable in straightforward agricultural projects and this is confirmed by an account of what happened to the Gran Couva farm on the La Gloria Estate.

In 1977, Servol realized that the youth farm idea was not destined to succeed. There were just too many cards stacked against the involvement of youth in agriculture at this particular stage of Trinidad and Tobago's development: the urban orientation of the educational system, the markedly higher wages paid to industrial as compared to agricultural workers, the steady rural to urban drift – all these militated against the involvement of youth in farming. So out of all this emerged "The Child-to-Community" project, or C.T.C. for short.

. . . . on the La Gloria Estate, the Child-to-Community project.



The foundation stones of the project were four nursery schools . . . .

The whole concept was based on Servol's urban experience over the last seven years. First and foremost was the conviction, that any project that did not involve the entire community, was destined to very limited gains. So a project was designed to incorporate every aspect of the community's life and involve every age group that constituted this community. The foundation stones of the project were four nursery schools dotted through the region, since Servol is utterly convinced that this is by far the most effective way to initiate a programme in a new area viz., to use the interest of adults in the advancement of their pre-school children in order to mobilise them and persuade them to assume communal responsibility for their children and eventually for themselves. Around these schools have grown a health and nutrition programme, a series of lessons in home economics and an adult education programme using leaders drawn from the community.

The major thrust of the programme lies in the setting up of "family farms" on 400 acres of land obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture. Thirty-eight families from the area have each been given ten to fifteen acres of land to farm. Servol, assisted by extension officers from the Ministry of Agriculture, helps them with technical advice, credit to purchase seed, fertilizer and insecticides, and low interest loans from the Agricultural Development Bank. There is also a tractor and motor pool which the farmers can draw on as required; apart from this, each family is master of its own land. The work "family" is a key concept in the project, for though experience has shown how difficult it has proved to settle the youth on farms, the same does not hold true when agricultural land is handed over to families. The East Indian nuclear family which predominates in the area, is a very closely knit unit which has an intelligently, pragmatic approach to the economics of rural life. In the same family, several members may take on seasonal work for the first six months of the year when the sugar cane is being harvested, others may work in construction, while yet others may grow and market vegetable crops in back-yard gardens. Given the opportunity to farm a ten acre plot, it is confidently expected that the family in question will roster its members in the most efficient manner to ensure that crops are grown, reaped and marketed, without interfering with income derived from non-agricultural sources. In this context, a long tradition has established the important role that the female members of the family play in keeping agriculture going, while the males seek alternative ways of making money.

Little by little, this neglected area is changing. The Land Rover which hums backward and forward along the rough roads, the tractor turning up the rich soil and the ambulance transporting a sick child to the nearest District Medical Office, are familiar signs of Servol's presence in the area; the four nursery schools and the tiny village hospital are focal points for the gathering of the communities; and the steady progress being made by Servol's community promoters, to encourage local leaders to play an increasingly important role in the development of their community, augurs well for the success of the C.T.C. project.

PROJECT OVERLOOK

The Child to Community project had originally been planned to involve not only the Gran Couva area (East of the Highway) but also the Claxton Bay area (West of the

Nursery schools of course.

. . . . classes on repairing electrical appliances.

Highway) including the villages of Diamond, Springvale and Sum Sum Hill. It was decided that these latter villages should be carefully researched in 1977 before starting a structured project. How does Servol conduct such evaluation to determine the components and scope of a formal project? By inundating the area with questionaires and investigators? Not really. The organization prefers to conduct its research by immediately setting up an un-structured, non-formal, non-funded project. What sort of project? If you haven't guessed by now, you haven't been reading this booklet very carefully. Nursery schools, of course.

Three such schools were set up, one in a community centre and two in tiny rooms of private houses. Teachers were selected and given some basic training by Servol, the community supplied simple benches and tables and the schools began in early 1978. Shortly after evening classes for some thirty young men and women in repairing electrical appliances were added, the Government Nutritional Board ran a very successful course in home economics for the girls and sports and recreation organized and expanded.

All this is yet another reminder of something that Servol has been saying for years: by far the best way to begin work in a hostile, suspicious, divided group of people, is to set up one or more pre-schools. There is no group of parents anywhere in the world who can resist an offer of educational help for their small children; and before they even realize what is happening, those parents become involved in the running of the school, the preparation of curricula, the building of furniture and equipment and the holding of parents' meetings. Once this is achieved, the germ of a true community spirit has been planted in the area.

It was thus around this simple project that Servol was able to meet the people of the area, to win their confidence and to find out what they really wanted for their community. A number of things soon emerged; first, a considerable percentage of the people in this area were migrants from Grenada and St. Vincent who were trying to put their roots down in Trinidad; second, though they had come to a basically agricultural area which was markedly similar to the rural areas of their home territories, the area was being visibly transformed by the setting up a huge industrial development estate in nearby Pt. Lisas; third, since the people were basically rural with little or no technical training, it seemed inevitable that they would be totally omitted from the industrial development of the area and were destined to form the most recent Shanty Town on the outskirts of a shining new industrial city.

With this information, Servol decided that this area should not form a part of the C.T.C. project but should have a project all to itself, with the significant title "Project Overlook". The next step was to visit people in key positions in the new industrial development and to ascertain how the people of Diamond, Springvale and Sum Sum Hill could be fitted into the proposed new city and what type of training was appropriate to the employment possibilities. So once again, Servol found itself intervening in the life of a group of migrant people, cut off from their roots, dislocated from their rural background and floundering in their efforts to understand and cope with a totally new experience of life. So Servol resolved to build yet another centre.

28

The intervention by Servol in the life of a particular group of people.

Meetings with the community were held more to ratify the final blue print than to ask their views since these latter had been pinpointed over the last two years. This centre would include skill training, family life education, health and social services, small business, drug counselling services, day nurseries and services for the aged, to mention some of the components. It was going to be another Servol Life Centre.

Life Centre? Another? Where did this term originate? Who started it? Servol has indeed got a Vocational Centre at the Beetham, a Welding Institute Centre in St. Barb's, the Sunshine Hill Centre off Piccadilly Street, the Central Office centre in Duncan Street, the C.T.C. Complex in La Gloria and the six community run nursery schools in Laventille. So if you want to build a centre in Claxton Bay, build one; if you are going to supply different forms of training, fair enough; if you intend to integrate the spiritual, the material, the individual, the collective, the young and the old, boys and girls, it sounds like a good idea. But why bring in this peculiar term "Life Centres"?

And then it all dawned on everybody at the same time. The structures that Servol had set up over the last nine years, were in fact life centres since every single one of them represented the intervention of Servol in the life of a particular group of people, in a particular area with particular problems. In fact, it became dazzingly clear, after a little reflection, that everything that Servol had set up, was in fact a life centre, some more developed than others, since Servol was really interested in touching the very lives of people and not merely one or other activity of these lives. Thus was the scene set for yet another period of evaluation, self-awareness and orientation which has clearly characterized the organization as one committed to the setting up of Life Centres.

. . . the migrant masses continue to pour in and expand the shanty towns and barrios . . .

. . . to help these migrant groups cope with the problems of their new life . . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LIFE CENTRE AND THE ROAD AHEAD

This booklet is being written in May, 1979. It is impossible to say in what precise direction the new thrust of Servol will move, as experience has shown, that an organization which has adopted a basic open-mindedness to people and to life as one of its characteristics almost never implements a project as planned. This being said, it may still be of some value, to pull together the experience of the last nine years into one comprehensive picture and to take a quick look into the future world of Servol.

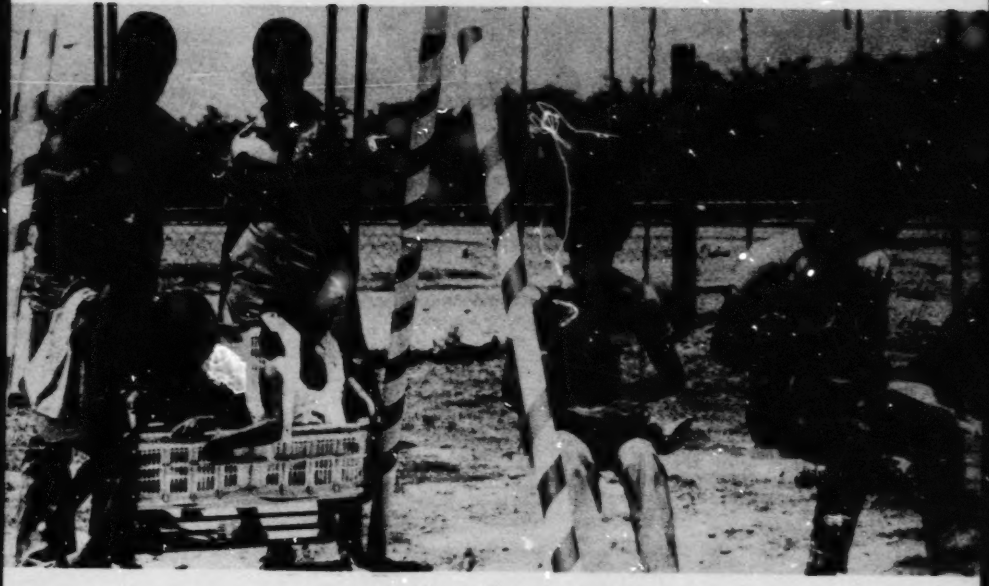
THE GLOBAL BACKGROUND

It is estimated that by the year 2000, one billion people will live in city-slums in the Third World. The rural-urban drift which began earlier in this century is gaining considerable momentum and is actually spreading from an intra-territorial phenomenon to large scale movements from one developing country to others which seem to offer more attractive possibilities for city living. To date, attempts to cope with this have centred around rural development programmes, laws to control migration and polemical rhapsodies on the beauty of agricultural life and the advantages of the extended family. The migrant masses have virtually ignored these efforts of urban based governments to persuade them not to come into the cities and continue to pour in and expand the shanty towns and barrios of the Third World cities.

A new and even more startling phenomenon has begun to emerge – the presence of unattached groups of children between the ages of seven and seventeen, who have severed all contact with adults and live in furtive gangs or groups in the bustling metropolitan areas of Kenya, Nigeria and Colombia to mention but a few Third World countries, as well as in the capital cities of developed countries. The growing number of these "gamins" as they are sometimes called, bears witness to the gradual disintegration of the extended family in these countries. To some this is a total tragedy but it is more probable that it represents a real step forward for the youth who are determined once and for all, to destroy the iron grip which traditional structures have placed on their desire to move out and change their world even if they have to endure untold hardship and suffering in the process.

It is time for leaders to accept the fact that, having allowed the mass media to paint a glowing, one-sided picture of city life, and having sunk the vast majority of their income in urban development, there is precious little they can do to stem this flow of peoples. It is imperative however that urgent steps be taken to help these migrant groups cope with the problems of their new life or else city life will eventually become unbearable for everybody. To quote Robert Mac Namara: "If cities do not begin to deal more constructively with poverty, poverty may well begin to deal more destructively with cities."

. . . . the centre must assume the role of parent substitute . . . .



. . . . replace callousness by tenderness . . .

THE CARIBBEAN BACKGROUND

The situation described above is a serious problem in the Eastern Caribbean and centres around the bustling city of Port-of-Spain in Trinidad. Not only has this city its fair share of rural migrants but it has an unusually high proportion of migrants from the neighbouring West Indian islands of Grenada, St. Vincent, Dominica and other islands of the Lesser Antilles. The reason is simple: with its oil based economy, Trinidad offers more possibilities for employment and education than the smaller islands whose economics are in shambles. The solution lies not in increased immigration controls but in developing a plan to deal with the problem of migration, which is best regarded as a simple, effective solution of the masses to deal with marked inequalities of income and opportunity in Third World areas. If this viewpoint is accepted, then the more developed metropoliton areas and the more developed territories in the region, will regard their contribution to any solution of the problem, as the most appropriate aid they can give to their less-favourably endowed neighbours.

ONE SOLUTION: THE LIFE CENTRE

A life centre, as defined by Servol, is a structure which is set up in an area where people have lost or are in danger of losing, one or other component which makes for an enriching experience of life, for the express purpose of restoring in some way, this richness to their life. The basic violence which poverty does to people is not principally economic or material; this is proved by the fact that highly motivated people with a healthy, positive self-image can emerge triumphantly successful from the most miserable situations. It is the harm which poverty does to the spirit which is all-pervading, pernicious and incredibly difficult to eradicate. Hence, any structure which purports to help a community to grow and develop out of a poverty situation, must literally encompass and include, every imaginable aspect of the community's life. Nothing, absolutely nothing, should be excluded in principle, though the realities of the existential situation, will inevitably demand that a modest and rather limited start be made; however, the point must be stressed that such a project must essentially remain an open-ended one, prepared to or rather, eager to, incorporate any component of the community's life into its mainstream, if and when the community shows signs of wanting to include it.

A life centre should provide a rich experience of life. If an analysis of a particular situation or a particular community reveals that the children emerge from school unable to obtain employment, then the programme must include training for employment; should the young man feel that the world owes, him a living, the strong emphasis on remuneration for production in the workshops, will soon bring him to his senses on this point; if there is a breakdown in the nuclear or even the extended family, the centre must assume the role of parent-substitute; if there is a marked tendancy for the male in the society to regard the female as an object of sexual exploitation, a component must be built in to the programme to replace callousness by tenderness and to temper physical needs with consideration; should the birth of a child be seen merely as a means of a girl securing a masculine partner, the attention of these young people must be drawn to the rights of the child as a being in itself, through an intelligent family education and population control

programme; the bewildered, hostile, confused adolescent who comes into the centre to "learn a trade", and experiences difficulty in forming relationships or accepting authority, must be slowly and gently led along the path of self-understanding and other-understanding, until he drops his mask and emerges from his protective walls. And all this, let it be said over and over again, is best accomplished in the bustling atmosphere of work, training, playing or informal conversation, rather than in classroom or lecture situations.

THE LIFE CENTRE WORKER

This leads to the absolutely crucial question: what type of person constitutes the staff of such a life centre? A cross between Francis or Assisi and Superman? Hardly. The problem is not half as formidable as it appears at first sight. In Servol, very ordinary people staff its life centres and this is important, because whether we like it or not, very ordinary people constitute the world into which the young men and women will be sent. So Servol has staff who together total up the entire list of human frailty and imperfection. They are careless, lose their temper, become defensive, refuse to cooperate, show authoritarian tendencies – you name it, they have it; And this is a vital part of the life experience, to allow the community to interact with very ordinary people for the mutual improvement of both.

This being said, there are certain tentative generalizations that Servol can make in the light of its own experience. First and foremost, there must be that difficult-to-explain but very palpable characteristic which any instructor or worker must exhibit; a real desire to work with, and for, young people. This trait can be found in a plumber and a book-keeper as well as a lorry driver; conversely, it can be comprehensively missing in a social worker, teacher or nurse. But if it isn't there, it is best to bid the applicant a polite farewell.

It is also generally true that people over twenty-seven inevitably prove more effective than younger applicants because maturity is usually a more important asset in the long run, than the idealistic enthusiasm of the young.

Be careful of highly emotional people who apply under the strong sentiment of a do-gooding mood, particularly when they seem to need love and affirmation from the young people with whom they are charged; they are good for short sprints, not distance running. Inevitably, they attempt to attach their charges to themselves and fiercely resent anyone else sharing in the exercise. They are not particularly good mothers and fathers and would make worse life centre instructors.

It is usually a healthy sign if the applicant has no difficulty in finding a job elsewhere; it means that he/she chooses to come to you. The danger with the alternative, is that the inability to find employment usually conceals a personality filled with insecurities, complexes and other traits, which are not compatible with the tough love which he or she is required to give. This type of love is a far cry from the weak, sentimental attachment which alternates attempts to "buy" cheap popularity from the students through indulgence, with periods in which the bewildered adolescents are castigated as ungrateful and

unredeemable. Use a microscope to search for tell-tale signs of authoritarian hang ups among professionals who apply, particularly when they are extremely critical of the "establishment" and have firm, though grandiose plans of what should be done. They inevitably end up by regarding you as the establishment and taking out the hurt of past experiences on your organization. This type works best with real establishment bureaucracies, which are so big and so impersonal that they can cushion the shock waves emanating from these tense individuals.

One final generalization which can be taken for what it is worth. Based entirely on its own experience, the category from which Servol has drawn its most effective workers are trained teachers who have spent at least ten years of teaching (preferably in primary school) and who have an urge to do something more or different and are prepared to leave the security of the teaching profession for a safari into the unknown. Should such a person apply, and should you detect in them a sense of genuine compassion for people in general, do not hesitate; bind them, gag them and carry them down to your life centre. They will fit in.

EPILOGUE

The years have passed by, nine of them, and each one has been fuller than its predecessor. Servol has begun to take itself more seriously, chiefly because so many other people have taken it very seriously indeed, have complimented it on its efforts and have looked to it for some answers to the tremendous problems facing our world. In this process of a growing awareness of itself, its philosophy and its mission, the organization has become life centred in more ways than one. It has evolved its own technique of intervening in the life of people, its own way of evaluating the effects of this intervention and its own defences against being encapsulated and ossified in structures of its own making.

Because at whatever cost, Servol feels it must remain free to move, to innovate, to improvise, to start all over again and this can only be achieved by a built-in plan for handing over centres and structures to the community, to be operated and run by the people themselves. If it cannot do this, then Servol will either die the way so many other organizations have died, or it will become just another bureaucratic structure trying desperately and unsuccessfully to cope with an expansion of its own making.

Perhaps there is no more fitting way to end than to quote from the final resolution passed at a seminar of people engaged in development work held in Cali, Colombia, in March, 1979, under the auspices of the Bernard Van Leer Foundation. That this resolution accurately reflects all that has been said in the preceding pages is not unrelated to the fact that Servol played a major part in the actual drafting of the resolution which reads as follows;

"The overwhelming sentiment that seemed to characterize notions about the future was hope and affirmation. Those who invest their lives and their commitments in attempting to improve the quality of life of others are basically sustained by a deep faith in what they are doing. At times the awesome dimensions of the social problems which exist and which are likely to increase over the next fifty years will tend to make some speak the language of despair. The temptation to linger on these doubts should be resisted. It should be recalled

that if one cannot reach large numbers of people one can at least ensure that the quality of intervention in small communities is of the highest order because these actions sometimes have a symbolic power far greater than can be imagined. Whatever the future holds for this world in terms of individual or collective systems, there will always be room for individuals to reach out and touch the lives of other individuals with benefit to both."

. . . a sense of genuine compassion for people in general . . . .

. . . its own technique of intervening in the life of people . . . .

... a real desire to work with and for young people.

35

INTEGRATED MIGRANT COMMUNITY
SELF – RELIANT CARING – PRODUCTIVE
ADJUSTED TO NEW ENVIRONMENT
VILLAGE MARKET
RECREATIONAL COMPLEX
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
LIGHT INDUSTRIES
VOCATIONAL CENTRE
DAY COURSES
EVENING COURSES
NURSERY SCHOOL
40%
60%
VILLAGE CENTRE
PRE-VOCATIONAL CENTRE
100 YOUTHS
BASIC SKILL TRAINING
CONCENTRATED LIFE EXPERIENCE
CHILDREN
ADULTS
YOUTH
GHETTOS AND SLUMS
MIGRANTS
FROM WEST INDIAN ISLANDS
FROM RURAL AREAS
FROM OTHER URBAN AREAS
CUT OFF FROM THEIR ROOTS
SERVOL LIFE CENTRE

APPENDIX ONE: FUTURE PLANS

Encouraged by what has emerged from this very recent exercise in evaluation, Servol has drawn up very concrete plans for its life centres, the realization of which depends more on its ability to get financial support to implement these plans, than any doubt or hesitation as to what must be done.

The Beetham Life Centre

This is easily the most developed of the life centres with its fully integrated range of services and programmes, its nursery school and its strong community involvement.

While it is true that the community development and life centre experience has been exciting and successful, it would be wishful thinking to conclude that all difficulties have been resolved. Three major problems remain:

(a) **The large numbers seeking entry to the Life Centre**

In March, 1979, Servol let it be known by word of mouth that vacancies existed for thirty-two (32) new apprentices. On the day in question, one hundred and forty (140) boys and girls (with their parents or guardians) lined up to apply for these places. This recurring problem has forced Servol to do some hard thinking along the lines of a quicker turnover of apprentices without a loss in quality of the training and the suggested solution to the problem constitutes the first component of the expanded project. It will involve the adding of a pre-vocational course to the programme in which 100 apprentices receive a four month course with forty per cent proceeding to take the full vocational course while the others are placed in semi-skilled jobs.

(b) **A lack of recreational space**

There is little doubt that situations in which dense urban populations have neither the space nor the facilities to express their physical and mental tensions in healthy play, are potentially dangerous. Those urban ghettos in which Servol has helped to organize sport, have improved markedly in community attitude; so that this will be the second component. Accordingly, Servol plans to develop extensive recreational facilities for the people of the area.

(c) **Economic development and independence**

A project may set up an entire range of services from day nurseries and pre-school, to vocational, medical and social services; in final analysis, unless the community in question can be helped to share in the economic benefits of the increased employment opportunities and arrange for some of the newly-gained wealth to circulate within the community instead of leaving it, the gains achieved will be temporary and partial.

. . . . the adding of a prevocational course to the programme . . . .

. . . . training in advanced welding . . . .

It is thus essential that a community such as the one we have been describing, be helped to set up a small network of shops, stores, markets etc. where various items can be manufactured or marketed, thereby ensuring that some capital, at least, remains within the community. This is the third and final component of the project: a village market, to be built immediately adjacent to the recreational complex.

The St. Barb's Life Centre

Already equipped with training in welding for young people, a medical clinic and pharmacy, recreational facilities and evening classes for adults in advanced welding, the decision has been taken to add a day nursery on to the complex, to emerge with a small but well integrated life centre.

The Sunshine Hill Life Centre

It is hoped to complete the basketball court and the children's playground by the end of the year. The people have already asked that a nursery school be added to the complex and plans have been made to implement this.

The La Gloria Life Centre (Child-to-Community Project)

With the nursery schools, the nutrition and health services and the home economics classes well under way, every attention is being given to the full development of the family farms. The end of 1979 should see a great deal of agricultural activity in the area and Servol is extremely interested in the outcome of this project.

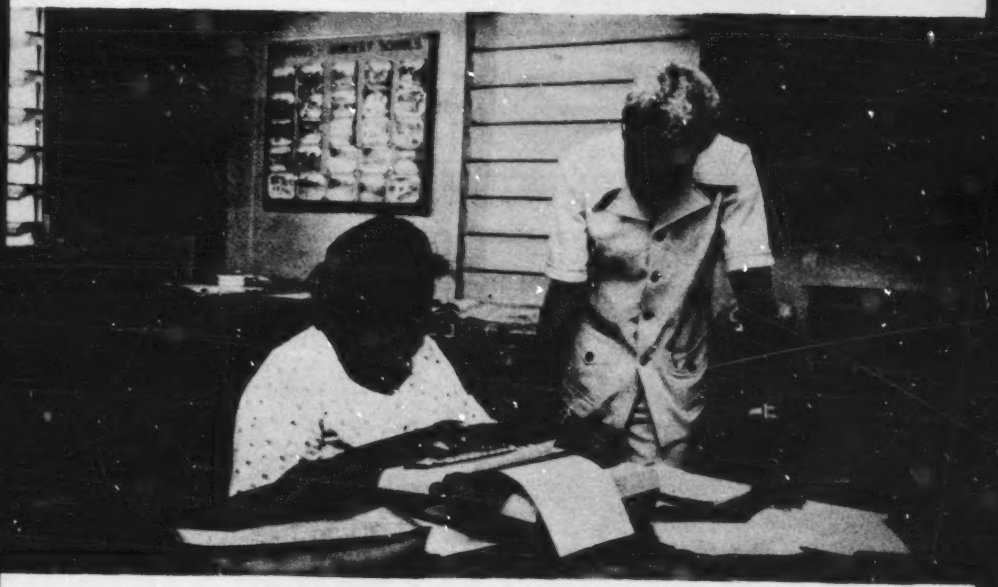
The Forres Park Life Centre (Project Overlook)

A mass meeting of the community drawn from the villages of Diamond, Springvale and Sum Sum Hill was held on April 28th, 1979, and the proposals drawn up by their leaders received full endorsement from the people. So the project is already under way. The three nursery schools are being fully equipped with tables, chairs and pre-school material; in fact, Servol has opened a special department to manufacture nursery school equipment from ends of wood and similar waste materials. The coordinating centre is being altered to house a training centre for teachers, a dental clinic (using equipment donated by a U.S. Foundation), home economics classes and an office. Permission has been sought to use an old house in Chaguanas as a drug and alcohol counselling service and literature has already been printed and distributed, on this very controversial subject. Of course, the real fun will begin when work on the Life Centre begins in earnest in July, when some eighty apprentices with their instructors, struggle to transform an old pig pen into a neat, modern centre, similar to the one on the Beetham Highway.

The Duncan Street Life Centre

Formerly Servol's office, the old building is being given a face lift and when finished will house Servol's accounting office, a typist pool, a library for primary school children, a coordinating centre for rehabilitation of ex-prisoners, an office assistants training programme, an emergency relief centre for victims of fire, earthquake or hurricane and a medical clinic with an X-ray department.

struggle to transform an old pig pen into a modern centre . . . .



. . . . . an office assistants' training programme . . . . . .

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APPENDIX TWO: STRUCTURE AND PERSONNEL

SERVOL

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

ELECTS

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Gerard Pantin (Chairman)
David Boucaud
Cyril Devaux
Richard Hobday
Diana Mahabir
Most Rev. Anthony Pantin

APPOINTS — **Executive Director** Gerard Pantin

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Kay Bartlett
Ian Collier
Zeller Homeward
Angela Massiah
George Mc Lean
Ruth Montrichard

SELECTS

LIFE CENTRE COMMITTEES

1. BEETHAM LIFE CENTRE COMMITTEE

Co-ordinator: Ruth Montrichard

Administrative Assistant: Vernon Langton

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Vocational
Youth/Adults

Phyllis Andrews
Christine Chang
Judy Chang
Jocelyn Gay
Reynold Henry
Clayton James
Paul London
Bernadette Miller
Ashton Semper
Aldwyn Valere
Steve Wesfield

Pre-School

Yvonne Carmichael
Petra Johnson
Yvonne Joseph
Jesmin Lewis
Lenore Lewis
Caroline Peters
Annette Pierre
Norma Williams

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Medical—Dental—Old People's Service—Social Work—Legal Aid—Day Nursery

Cecil Alexander
George Berkley
Jerome Boos
Michael Camps
Owen Clarke
Virginia Durity
Nicola Hawkins
Arthur Marshall
May O'Keefe
N.S. Padmanabhan
Gladyz Pierre
Frances Rimmer
Marlene Valdez

2. ST. BARB'S LIFE CENTRE COMMITTEE

Administrator: Claudius Dick

Welding Instructor: Joseph Dickson

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Vocational—Youth/Adults

Lloyd Ahye
Steve Duncan

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Medical—Social Work

Michael Camps
Anthony Chang Kit
Anthony Charles
David Grant

3. SUNSHINE HILL LIFE CENTRE COMMITTEE

Co-ordinator: Zeller Homeward

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Special School—Adult Classes

Angela Drayton
Geraldine Merkx
Johanna Nothnagel
Gail Parker
Teresa Phillips
Carol Richards
Margaret Roberts

Pre-School

Urina Blackman
Maria Edwards
Jennifer King
Selphia Mc Millan
Marilyn Melville
Orlet Paul
Eileen Pierre

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Day Nursery—Medical Clinic—Social Work

Phyllis De Coteau
Curt Estrada
Michael John
Joseph Mc Intosh
Sandra Sealy
Madge Wilson
George Worme

4. DUNCAN STREET LIFE CENTRE COMMITTEE

Co-ordinator/Accountant: George Mc Lean

Administrative Assistant: Marilyn James

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Administrative—Literacy—Library
Public Relations

Ian Collier
Christina Francis
Louise Gibbs
Diana Mahabir
Angela Massiah
Ruth Montrichard
Joan Nicholas
Gerard Pantin

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Emergency/Disaster Relief—Medical
X-ray Unit

Egbert Daisy
Cheryl Downes
Ruby Fraser
Erica Hawkins
Diana Mahabir
Ilda Maundy
N.S. Padmanabhan
Marlene Valdez

A Life Centre may include .....

... the building of a bakery ...

... or the setting up of a co-operative.

Cricketnets and basketball court of St.Bab's life centre

A group of welding graduates face the future

5. LA GLORIA LIFE CENTRE COMMITTEE

Co-ordinator: Angela Massiah

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Agriculture—Nutrition

Ronald Bahadur
Terrance Rosado
Cecil Salandy
Rex Salandy
Merle Subhan

Pre-School

Sally Bahadur
Sylvia Caraspee-Hunte
Teresa Fitzpatrick
Judy Gadjadhur
Mauva Joseph
Nadira Kangoo
Magdalene Mitchell-Griffith
Christine O'Connell
Kooarie Ramnath
Margaret Sankar

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Medical—Social Work

A. Aberdeen
Vincent Cox
Sylvia Jalsa
Roderick Patterson
Sylvia Samaroo

6. FORRES PARK LIFE CENTRE COMMITTEE

Co-ordinator: Kay Bartlet

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Vocational—Youth/Adults

Charles Bridgewater
Dorothy De grasse
Maurice Henry
Ron Kukler
Bernard Mitchell
Errol Paul
Errol Wilson

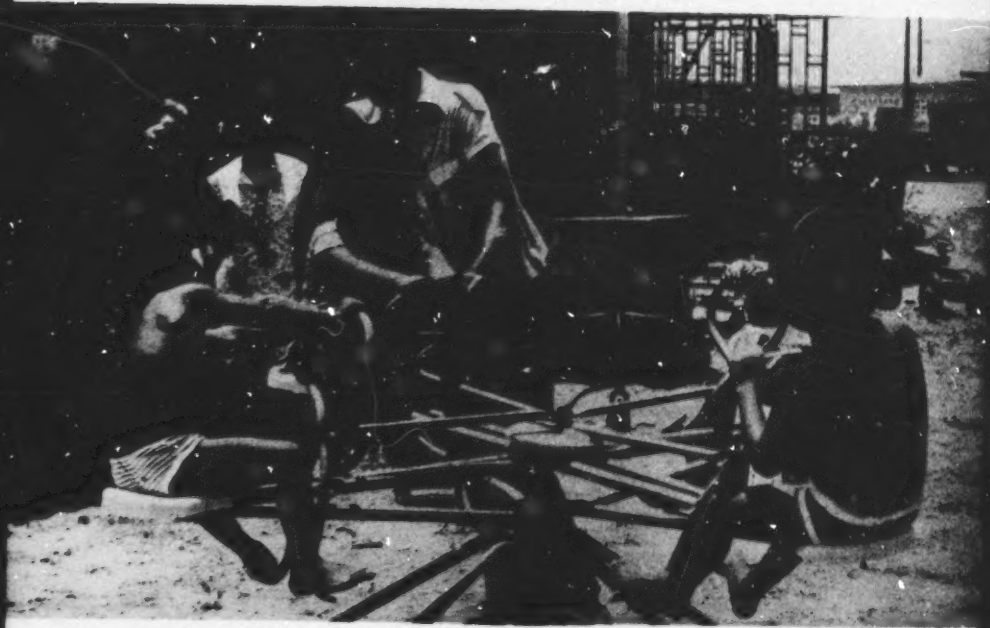
Pre-School

Judith Joseph
Annette Samuel
Claudette Toby

COMMUNITY SERVICE

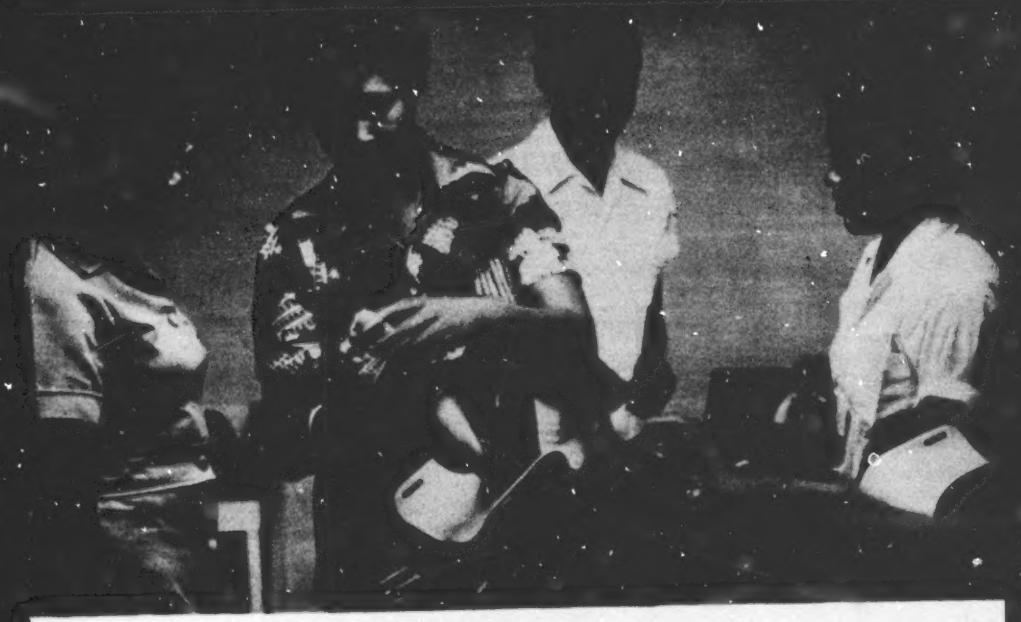
Drug Counselling—Social Work—Medical

Harold Bertrand
Kalwatee Dowlath
Janet Fleming



A time to play . . . . .

. . . . and a time to rest . . . .



. . . . The surgicentre, Beetham Life Centre . . . .

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